

MEMORANDUM

November 30, 2009

TO: Councilmembers

FROM: Phil Andrews, Council President



SUBJECT: Council Actions of 2009

By any reasonable measure, the Council accomplished much this year for the people of Montgomery County. We did this by listening to our constituents, and by working hard and well together. Outstanding work by staff aided us immeasurably. Attached is a summary of major County Council actions of 2009. Here are some highlights:

A landmark accomplishment was – despite the deepest recession since the Great Depression – approval of a budget that protected employees from layoffs, that reduced spending wisely while protecting essential services and safety net programs, that adhered to the Charter Limit, and that did not raise tax rates. For the first time since 1992, tax-supported operating budget spending is less than the prior year's. The Council and County Executive agreed on core budget principles from the start to the finish of the budget process, and the County kept its AAA bond rating.

With regard to transportation, 2009 has been a landmark year. The Council unanimously recommended to the state three transportation projects of regional importance: the Purple Line, the Corridor Cities Transitway, and widening I-270 by adding two reversible lanes. Now, we need to work with our state and federal officials to get funding to build these projects as soon as possible to provide traffic relief to our constituents. The Council also approved planning funds for another landmark transportation project: a 100-mile system of bus rapid transit lanes.

In 2009, the Council opened two long-needed, landmark facilities: the West Germantown Fire Station, and the Family Justice Center, which has already served more than a thousand victims of domestic violence since it opened in April.

The Council also took landmark actions to improve accountability by reforming the disability retirement system, requiring Internet posting of spending of \$25,000 or more, empowering the Inspector General to hire counsel, calling for suspension and reform of the tuition assistance program, and requiring single-subject bills to enable a clean, clear vote on an issue by preventing unrelated issues from being combined.

Sadly, this year we lost Don Praisner. Don's staff soldiered on magnificently, and councilmembers and staff looked out for District Four. I especially thank Council Vice President Berliner for serving on a third Council committee during that difficult time.

Thanks for the hard work you did that produced these results for our constituents, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your president this year.

2009 Council Actions on Budget, Education, Public Safety, and Transportation

Budget (FY 2010)

- *Avoided layoffs by not funding general wage increases for 33,000 County-funded employees (22,000 are MCPS employees), saving \$125 million
- *Protected essential services and safety net programs while approving a tax-supported operating budget less than the prior year's (first time since 1992)
- *Kept to Charter Limit on property tax revenues and didn't increase tax rates
- *Did not approve an early buyout estimated to cost \$16 million over 10 years
- *Did not approve a proposed expansion of the take-home car program for County police officers who live up to 15 miles outside of the County
- *Approved a mid-year savings plan of \$30 million

Education

- *Approved 100% of Montgomery County Public Schools' educational request in the operating budget and school construction request in the capital budget
- *Approved legislation creating a Workforce Investment Scholarship program to provide tuition assistance for Universities at Shady Grove and Montgomery College students pursuing degrees in fields with labor shortages
- *Rejected Planning Board proposal to raise threshold school facilities payments from developers from 105% of cluster capacity to 110%
- *Rejected Planning Board proposal to allow developers to borrow capacity within a cluster to avoid the school facilities payment or a moratorium

Public Safety

- *Approved funding for the Family Justice Center, which opened in April
- *Opened the Germantown West Fire Station; Germantown East underway
- *Approved funding for 14 new ambulances
- *Rejected the County Executive's proposed ambulance fee regulation
- *Evaluated speed camera program, and approved its expansion
- *Approved a federal grant for a pilot program of video cameras in patrol cars
- *Approved purchase of the former National Geographic property to meet public safety space needs, including for the Rockville District Police Station
- *Did not support the County Executive's plan to add a MCPD helicopter unit
- *Approved legislation to improve pedestrian and vehicular safety by prohibiting large trucks and RVs from parking on residential streets
- *Approved a policy to ensure that sidewalks and walkways are built in a way and with materials that prevent tripping hazards for pedestrians

Transportation

- *Recommended construction of the Purple Line, the Corridor Cities Transitway, and the widening of I-270 by adding two reversible lanes
- *Rejected Planning Board proposal to accept more congestion on roads by lowering acceptable average traffic speeds
- *Approved funding to prevent elimination of 18 bus routes
- *Approved \$500,000 to plan a countywide system of bus rapid transit

Additional Major County Council Actions – 2009

Affordable Housing

- *Approved an increase in the Housing Initiative Fund over FY 2009 to preserve affordable units, leverage financing for new affordable housing

Campaign Finance Reform

- *Helped persuade the Montgomery County Delegation and the House of Delegates to approve legislation giving the County authority to pass more comprehensive campaign finance disclosure requirements for County elections than required by the State; however, the bill died in the State Senate

Economic Development

- *Approved the Germantown Master Plan
- *Approved purchase of Webb Tract, and purchase of the Finmarc property to relocate government facilities to make room for major housing development around the Shady Grove Metro as called for in the Shady Grove Sector Plan
- *Council advocacy/letter of financial support helped persuade the State to locate the Maryland Clean Energy Center at Universities at Shady Grove
- *Provided funding for Bethesda Green incubator, a public-private venture

Employment of People with Disabilities

- *Approved establishing a hiring preference for people with disabilities who apply for County government jobs and are rated in the highest category
- *Approved requesting the Charter Review Commission to review whether the Charter should be amended to establish a special hiring authority for people with disabilities (similar to the Federal Government's Schedule A)

Energy Conservation

- *Approved a law establishing the Home Energy Loan Program; regulations are under development; funded solar/geothermal/new windows tax credit
- *Approved reducing energy consumption in County government facilities by four percent in FY 2010, a savings of \$1.1 million

Environmental Protection

- *Established and appointed a Clarksburg Water Quality Task Force

Government Reform

- *Approved a law reforming the disability retirement system to help ensure that meritorious claims are approved and non-meritorious claims are not
- *Approved law requiring internet posting of County government spending of \$25,000 or more (takes effect in 2010)
- *Approved a law enabling the Inspector General to hire independent counsel
- *Approved a law limiting Council legislation to a single subject to prevent unrelated non-meritorious measures from being included in meritorious bills
- *Upon Council urging, tuition assistance program suspended; reform pending

Health Initiatives

- *Approved law requiring that the calories in meals be listed on menu boards, and that other nutritional information be available on request
- *Approved law allowing the Drug Enforcement Forfeitures Fund to be used for drug prevention, drug treatment, and Drug Court
- *Added funding to maintain youth tobacco prevention programs
- *Approved expanding the free summer lunch program for students

Libraries

- *Affirmed the policy of free parking for patrons of County libraries by reimbursing Rockville for library patrons who use the City's garage

Mansionization

- *December 2008 Council-approved law took effect, reducing the size of new homes allowed in smaller-lot zones to protect existing neighborhoods

Parks and Open Space

- *Approved the purchase of a 52.9 acre addition to Fairland Recreational Park
- *Approved \$5 million to terminate building rights in the Agricultural Reserve
- *Opened the Matthew Henson Trail and Broad Acres Local Park

WSSC Infrastructure

- *Approved funding to accelerate inspection/repair of large-diameter pipes

In addition to acting on the measures above, the Council worked hard to improve outreach to the public and strengthen relationships with other government officials:

Public Outreach

- *Council held three televised town hall meetings, and televised a significant number of committee meetings as well as all Council sessions
- *Council held five public hearings on the FY 10 budget, and two evenings of public hearings each on the Gaithersburg West Master Plan and on the White Flint Sector Plan in order to hear from all who wished to testify
- *Councilmembers attended hundreds of community events
- *Council president did weekly media briefings/question and answer sessions
- *Council president did three live call-in shows with the County Executive
- *Council funded a professional, independent 2009 Resident Survey to learn what residents think about County Government (results will be out soon)
- *Council heard from local business leaders during fiscal update briefings

Strengthening Working Relationships with other Government Officials

- *Met separately with each of the County's five representatives in Congress
- *Met with County Executive Leggett, the County Attorney, the Board of Education, Montgomery College, the Planning Board, the Board of Appeals, Montgomery County General Assembly leaders, municipal officials, and WSSC